

THE CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART

PUBLIC RELATIONS OFFICE
CLEVELAND, OHIO 44106
TELEPHONE (216) 421-7340

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FOR RELEASE ON RECEIPT:
CLEVELAND MUSEUM OF ART
ACQUIRES PAINTING BY DUTCH
ARTIST HENDRICK TERBRUGGHEN

The Cleveland Museum of Art has acquired its first painting by the Dutch artist Hendrick Terbrugghen (1588-1629), Museum director Sherman E. Lee has announced. Terbrugghen was one of the earliest and most important Northern followers of the revolutionary Italian Baroque painter Caravaggio (1573-1610), and the new Museum acquisition exhibits the vivid realism and dramatic contrasts of light and shadow for which Caravaggio is renowned.

The painting, entitled The Weeping Heraclitus, depicts the ancient Greek philosopher whose pessimistic beliefs earned him a reputation for melancholy, seated at a table, tearfully contemplating a human skull and an open book propped upon a human bone. The philosopher's head, with its sparse white hairs and furrowed brow, his gnarled hands, and the pages of the book, are brightly illuminated. The warm tones of the realistically modeled flesh and the book's white pages are in sharp contrast to the somber olive-greens and blacks of the philosopher's garments and the painting's dark background.

An oil on canvas, the work measures 49-1/4 inches high by 40 inches wide; it is in remarkable condition and has never been relined. Terbrugghen's signature and the date 1621 appear on the page of the book below the philosopher's left hand.

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2-the weeping heraclitus

The painting was formerly in the collection of Sir Watkin Williams Wynn of Wynnstay, an 18th-century Welsh collector, and was sold by his heirs to the Trafalgar Galleries in London, where it was recently purchased by the Museum. It has been authenticated by British art scholar Benedict Nicolson, the foremost authority on Terbrugghen and author of the monograph Hendrick Terbrugghen (Lund Humphries, London, 1958).

At first, the aged scholar in the painting was thought to be St. Jerome, since the saint is often shown in mournful meditation with a book and skull. However, Nicolson pointed out that the figure in the Cleveland Museum painting is identical to a figure of Heraclitus in another painting by Terbrugghen, formerly in a Copenhagen collection, showing the melancholy philosopher with the so-called "laughing" philosopher, Democritus. In this painting, Heraclitus broods and Democritus gloats over a half-globe with a scene of people engaged in boisterous merrymaking.

The two philosophers, popular subjects in 17th-century art, are usually depicted with globes as in two paintings by Terbrugghen in the Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, showing Democritus with a sphere of the heavens and Heraclitus with a globe of the earth. "That Terbrugghen chose to represent the Heraclitus in the Cleveland Museum painting with a skull instead of a globe is not inappropriate," explains Dr. Lee, "when one considers that the skull is often associated with melancholy and that both skull and terrestrial globe have traditionally symbolized the transience of life, an idea with which Heraclitus was deeply concerned."

The Weeping Heraclitus is one of approximately fifteen works by Terbrugghen now in the United States. According to Dr. Lee, the Cleveland Museum has been looking for some years for a painting by Terbrugghen comparable in quality to his St. Sebastian Tended by St. Irene in the collection of the Allen Memorial Art Museum at Oberlin, Ohio, considered one of the artist's finest works.

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3-the weeping heraclitus

Terbrugghen's art has been collected in this country only since the 1940s, following a revival of interest in his work and the discovery of a number of his pictures, some of which had been attributed to other followers of Caravaggio. Although he is now considered one of the leading Dutch artists of his time, he is scarcely mentioned by 17th-century writers on art.

He was born in 1588 near Deventer in the province of Overijssel, and later settled in Utrecht, where he reportedly studied under Abraham Bloemaert, the city's leading painter. Authorities agree that he spent ten years in Italy, probably arriving around 1604. Here he encountered Caravaggio's works, if not the master himself, who was in Rome until 1606. In 1614 Terbrugghen returned to Utrecht where he worked until his death in 1629.

Unfortunately, no compositions from his Italian sojourn are known today. Works dating from his later years in Utrecht are mainly religious subjects--some derived from Caravaggio--and genre scenes with gamblers and musicians typical of the Utrecht School.

During his lifetime, Terbrugghen was overshadowed by his more famous and successful Utrecht contemporary, Gerard van Honthorst. That his work was less popular than Honthorst's seems evident from the writings of Honthorst's student, Joachim von Sandrart, who criticized Terbrugghen for what he considered his melancholy and unpleasant realism.

In the early 18th century Terbrugghen's son Richard attempted to restore his father's reputation. He is credited with the story that Rubens, on a visit to Utrecht in 1627, remarked that he had found only one real painter in his travels through the Netherlands--Terbrugghen. Richard also presented to the city of Deventer his father's paintings of the Four Evangelists, which until the late 19th century were almost the only works by Terbrugghen known in Holland.

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4-the weeping heraclitus

Since then nearly 80 other paintings by Terbrugghen have been re-discovered in private and public collections in Europe. Some of the artist's most important works are now in the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam and the Centraal Museum in Utrecht.

The Weeping Heraclitus has been installed in the Museum's galleries for Baroque painting in the company of works by Caravaggio and his other important followers--Orazio Gentileschi, Gerard van Honthorst, Valentin de Boulogne, Jusepe de Ribera and Georges de la Tour.

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For additional information or photographs, please contact Ann Edwards, The Cleveland Museum of Art, 11150 East Boulevard, Cleveland, Ohio 44106; 216/421-7340.